

# Grassroots Education Request for Proposals Questions & Answers

## 2025 - 2026 PROGRAM YEAR

The questions below have been edited for brevity and clarity and to remove identifying information. Questions asked more than once have been grouped.

### Eligibility

#### 1. Please explain more about how fiscal sponsorship works.

Community-based organizations may be highly qualified to conduct grassroots education campaigns but may not be registered non-profits or otherwise able to perform the financial and contractual obligations required by this funding. In these instances, a registered non-profit organization may act as a fiscal sponsor for other organizations that develop and implement these campaigns but do not have non-profit status. Fiscal sponsorship can be a way to ensure small, hyper-local organizations participate in grassroots education. Fiscal sponsors cannot act on behalf of for-profit firms, trade groups, or political organizations.

Collaborative proposals or proposals using fiscal sponsorship must specify the roles, responsibilities, and budgets of collaborative partners and demonstrate an equitable approach to decision-making processes. In the case of fiscal sponsorship, the fiscal sponsor will be the lead applicant and must submit the proposal on behalf of the partnership. Should funding be awarded, the sponsor organization will execute the contract and, as such, will be responsible for the execution of the campaign and finances for the project, for submitting interim and final reports, and for all other contract obligations.

#### 2. Can an entity be a local business to submit a proposal for Grassroots Education?

If the local business is organized for profit, it would not be eligible to be a Grassroots Educator. For-profit firms (including small businesses) can be used to provide discrete

products and services in support of the campaign as a subcontractor. For instance, small businesses could be used for services such as the physical production of campaign materials—but may not make up more than 10% of the campaign budget.

**3. Are you looking for organizations that can cover a large geographic region? Or can the applicant focus on just one or two communities?**

Applicants should focus on geographic areas where they have previously worked on some type of community engagement or grassroots education or in areas where they believe they can successfully work in the future on Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA) Grassroots Education campaigns. The ILSFA Program Administrator is interested in all proposals, regardless of the size or number of the geographic regions served.

In addition, Section 8.12.4 of the 2024 Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan sets a target of allocating up to 60% of the available grassroots education funding toward environmental justice communities. As such, selection will prioritize campaigns focusing on environmental justice communities.

For more information on the process for determining which communities qualify for (or may apply to be considered as) “environmental justice communities,” please see the [ILSFA website](#). Maps and address lookup tools are available for every address in the state to determine if they are in an environmental justice community as so defined. Click to view the [address lookup tool](#).

In addition, a program goal this year is to have at least two Grassroots Educators focus on geographies that other Grassroots Education campaigns have not previously served. Some of the geographies that have not been served or have only been served in a limited capacity include West Chicago and West Suburbs (Aurora, Austin, West Town); South Suburbs (Blue Island, Riverdale, Harvey); Will County; Kane County; Lake County; and rural areas of Central, Western and Southern portions of the State.

**4. Is Salesforce still a required tool for data entry needed for the program and if so, is the model the same?**

Yes, Salesforce is used to capture data on Grassroots Education events. Salesforce is a cloud-based Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database software tool.

The Salesforce tool and associated data entry processes have been streamlined to increase efficiency. Extensive training is provided to all Grassroots Educators on the use of Salesforce once selected, and ongoing one-on-one support is also available to Grassroots Educators to answer any questions or troubleshoot any technical issues.

**5. Is there a difference between registered as a non-profit organization with the State of Illinois as a non-profit and a 501(c)(3)?**

Prospective Grassroots Educators must be registered as non-profit organizations with the Illinois Secretary of State. Separately, 501(c)(3) status is a federal tax exemption status granted by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Organizations are not required to have the 501(c)(3) status in order to apply to be Grassroots Educators. While many non-profit organizations registered with the Illinois Secretary of State also hold the 501(c)(3) status, some may not have this status.

**6. The RFP states: "organizations funded through this RFP, and officers, directors, employees, and volunteers of organizations funded through this RFP, cannot, at any time during the contract period or for six months after the conclusion of the contract period, receive payments from any Approved Vendor..." This is a very broad statement, particularly when including volunteers who may be salaried employees of an Approved Vendor. If an individual connected with a prospective Grassroots Educator education receives a regular salary during the course of their pre-existing employment with an Approved Vendor, would the organization be disqualified? Are there opportunities to allow the organization to still be considered for funding, such as a conflict-of-interest policy?**

The Grassroots Education Request for Proposals (RFP) requires that individuals possessing potential conflicts of interest, such as in the example above, be disclosed to the ILSFA Program Administrator in the proposal so that the conflict can be appropriately considered and, if necessary, addressed. Disclosure of a potential or apparent conflict of interest will not typically result in the disqualification of an otherwise eligible prospective Grassroots Educator. Instead, if the Grassroots Educator is qualified and receives a tentative award, the ILSFA Program Administrator would work with the prospective Grassroots Educator to address the potential or apparent conflict. Developing a conflict-of-interest policy could be part of a resolution to a potential or apparent conflict, but each situation will depend on its specific details.

**7. We are part of a taskforce for a Diocese that is focusing on reaching net-zero by 2030. We are considering applying for your grassroots education grants. Would ILSFA allow a religious organization to be a recipient of this grassroots education grant, understanding that all our efforts will serve Illinoisans regardless of religious affiliation? Would a diocese recognized under the Illinois religious corporation act of 1872 be considered a nonprofit by your guidelines? We think we would be well-positioned to focus on Environmental Justice communities as several of our parishes are located in or near EJ census tracts, and one of our goals is to increase involvement and positive environmental impact in those communities.**

Yes, religious organizations are eligible to apply as long as they are registered non-profit organizations with the Illinois Secretary of State.

## Submission Requirements

### 1. What are the criteria for submission, and how do I submit my proposal?

All applicants must complete and submit all information specified in the RFP. Follow the instructions starting on page 21 of the RFP and provide information for each section listed from pages 21 to 26 of the RFP. All sections must be complete for proposals to be evaluated and considered for an award. Please also submit a campaign budget using one of the two budget workbooks provided.

Do not include services or work not specifically related to Grassroots Education, ILSFA, and this RFP. Clearly indicate in your response any designation of proposal content as proprietary or confidential information, as well as in any accompanying cover letter or document, and please submit both an original and redacted version of your proposal where appropriate.

To submit a proposal, all required information must be submitted electronically to [Grassroots@illinoisSFA.com](mailto:Grassroots@illinoisSFA.com) no later than April 4, 2025 (11:59 p.m. CT). Applicants must respond to questions, prompts, and attestations in a Microsoft Word document, PDF, or similar file type and must submit this with required and optional attachments.

### 2. When is the last day to apply?

The last day to apply is April 4th by 11:59 p.m. CT. All required information must be submitted electronically to [Grassroots@illinoisSFA.com](mailto:Grassroots@illinoisSFA.com). Applicants must respond to questions, prompts, and attestations in a Microsoft Word document, PDF, or similar file type and must submit this with required and optional attachments.

### 3. Is there a page limit and/or word count limit for proposals?

There is no page limit or word limit. Please be sure to answer all the questions in the RFP (starting on page 21).

## Availability of Materials

### 1. Are the webinar sessions related to this RFP being recorded?

Yes, the two webinar sessions were recorded and posted to the [Grassroots Education RFP](#) page.

**2. Will the second Grassroots Education RFP webinar cover new material or the same material as the first Grassroots Education RFP webinar?**

Both webinars cover the same material. However, some questions asked by the attendees may differ. Both webinars were recorded and posted online on the [Grassroots Education RFP](#) page.

**3. Can you share the presentation deck?**

The slide deck can be found on the [Grassroots Education RFP](#) page.

## Program Clarifications

**1. How many GE educators do you expect to be selected?**

There is no limit to the number of Grassroots Educators to be selected. However, the total budget across all proposals is expected to be up to \$1,500,000 for the 18-month period.

**2. Is there a way to connect with previous grantees to partner with?**

Grassroots Educators are announced each year after they have been selected. The list of current Grassroots Educators and their contact information is available on our [Grassroots Education](#) page, and you are welcome to contact them.

**3. Can we contact current Grassroots Education organizations to learn more about creating a successful campaign?**

The list of current Grassroots Education organizations for the 2024-2025 program year was provided in an ILSFA newsletter on August 8, 2024. You can also find a list of the current Grassroots Educators on the ILSFA website.

- A Just Harvest
- Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)
- Citizens Utility Board (CUB)
- El Valor
- Faith in Place
- Far South Community Development Corporation
- Garfield Park Community Council (GPCC)
- Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO)
- Party Per Purpose
- Plant Chicago

#### 4. Can the bid tabulation for the previous RFP cycle be provided?

The RFP Bid Selection Scoring chart can be found on page 18 of the RFP and is the same scoring system that was used in the previous year's RFP. The scoring chart can be found below:

- Campaign Scoring Strength of the campaign: 40 possible points
- Experience of organization: 20 possible points
- Cost and value of delivery: 15 possible points
- Staff and board reflect the demographics of the community served: 10 possible points
- Applying as a new organization (including a fiscal sponsor working with a new organization) and/or serving a new or under-served geographic area: 15 possible points
- Total Possible Score: 100

#### 5. Will this presentation be available for participants to view again?

Yes. The recording for this presentation, along with the recording for the first webinar presented on March 3, 2025, are available to view on the [Grassroots Education RFP](#) page.

## Campaign Questions

#### 1. Can a campaign focus on high school students?

Since high school students are typically not property owners or renters, a campaign focused on high school students would not be considered effective for this RFP. The purpose of the ILSFA program is to encourage homeowners to enroll in the Residential Solar sub-program and renters or homeowners who are not a good fit for Residential Solar to enroll in community solar subscriptions.

If the campaign recruits and trains high school students to implement campaign activities such as events or canvassing that target homeowners and renters, then such a campaign approach would be appropriate.

## Term of Awards Under This RFP

#### 1. Can a percentage of the contract be paid upfront?

Yes, it is possible to request a one-time advance payment of up to 10% of the not-to-be-exceeded budgeted amount for the campaign.

Organizations seeking alternative payment terms and conditions must show a need for advance payment as evidenced by the following documentation, which must be included with the proposal:

- Audited financial statements for the most recently ended fiscal year, including SAS No. 114 and SAS No. 115.

If the organization has not completed an audit for the most recently ended fiscal year, then an unaudited financial statement for the most recently ended fiscal year certified by the Board Chair of the organization should be submitted.

Self-certification of the need for advance payment stating hardship to the organization or limitations to the proposed campaign created by the standard payment terms. The responder will provide additional documentation supporting its self-certification as reasonably requested by the ILSFA Program Administrator.

- 2. Is the funding for the grassroots education grant at all dependent upon federal funding? If federal funds are clawed back or frozen, is there any risk for non-profits to be required to do unpaid work or have lengthy delays in reimbursement? Given the current political climate, it would be helpful at assure my board that these funds are not dependent upon the Federal Government.**

The Illinois Solar for All program is funded through state resources, not federal funds.

Section 1-56(b)(3) of the Illinois Power Agency Act provides that up to 5% of the Illinois Solar for All funding be available for Grassroots Education.

## Invoicing Requirements

- 1. What are allowable expenses for in-person events, e.g., food and drink, childcare, participant stipends, educator stipends, educator assistant stipends?**

Allowable and reimbursable expenses include travel to a public meeting from your office location (e.g., mileage and parking or train tickets), refreshments offered at public events, cost of printing materials for events, supplies used at events, or stipends for focus group participants. For organizations using the time-and-materials budgeting option, all expenses must be supported by itemized receipts and included within invoicing documentation. For the per-unit pricing budgeting option, itemized receipts will not be required for these types of expenses. The documentation must include attendance logs or sign-in sheets along with the meeting or training agenda.

Certain items or costs are not reimbursable. For example, alcoholic drinks or the commute from home to the office are not allowable. When in doubt, always ask the

ILSFA Program Administrator to help you identify if an expense is allowable before you incur any costs. Childcare costs are not currently a reimbursable expense.

Here are some of the guidelines regarding guidelines for reimbursement of food, lunches, or snacks:

- **SNACKS:** Snacks for events include crackers, chips, cookies, water, soda, and juices. You are welcome to offer snacks and refreshments to event participants. The number of snacks should be reasonable for the expected number of participants. It is recommended that snacks be offered for events less than four hours.
- **LUNCHES:** Full menu lunches (sandwiches, pizza, salads, soups, etc.) are allowable if an event is four or more hours. The amount of food ordered should be reasonable with the expected number of participants. Reimbursement will be given at a rate of \$16/person. Lunch and snacks can be purchased if an event is expected to last more than six hours.
- **FOOD FOR LUNCH-N-LEARNS:** This expense is reimbursable if the audience includes stakeholders as well as staff. It is not reimbursable if the audience only includes internal staff.
- **LUNCH/COFFEE FOR INTERNAL GRASSROOTS EDUCATOR MEETINGS:** This expense is not reimbursable if this event includes only internal staff.

Participant stipends are an allowable expense, but because Grassroots Education activities are supported by State funding, transparency and reporting are essential. A supplemental Grassroots Education Panelist and Participant Stipend Form is required anytime a panelist or participant is compensated for their participation. The stipends are capped at \$40/hr.

## **2. We are an Approved Vendor. Is there an approved tri-fold brochure with general information about the program?**

The ILSFA program utilizes digital brochures for easy use and distribution. You may find available marketing materials about the ILSFA program on the [Education and Resources](#) page. These materials include three digital brochures that provide a detailed overview of each sub-program (Residential Solar, Community Solar, and Non-Profit and Public Facilities).